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# RETROSPECTIVE OF AND PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING OF TOURISM IN THE MOUNTAIN REGIONS OF SERBIA

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Following on from previous research, this paper provides a comparative retrospective overview of trends in the development of mountain tourism destinations (MTDs) in European countries and their influence on MTD development in Serbia. The prospects for developing tourism in the mountain regions of Serbia follow the European trends and experiences in sustainable MTD development. These trends and experiences should be selectively implemented and adapted to the social and economic conditions, the characteristics of Serbian mountain regions and the effects on the local and regional spatial development. The paper gives a critical view of the role of strategic planning in developing tourism in Serbian mountain regions. The problems that have influenced the prevailing uncontrolled development of MTDs, the marginalization of the role of strategic planning and the limited implementation of spatial planning in their development have been identified. The possibilities for achieving the coordinating role of spatial planning in strategic planning were assessed for the National Park and MTD Kopaonik. In this case the harmonization of the various sectoral plans and programs, the multisectoral coordination of development entities in the public sector, participation in the planning process and partnerships in decision making and implementation have been achieved in the process of spatial planning, and this should be implemented for other MTDs and improved in the future.

**Key words:** mountain tourism destinations in Serbia and European countries, tourism development, strategic planning, spatial planning, sustainable spatial development.

## INTRODUCTION

The available potential for developing tourism in Serbian mountain regions has only been partly activated in the past for mountain tourism destinations (MTD) and mountain resorts. Serbian mountain regions have developed under the influence of trends in European countries, particularly in the Alps, which have influenced the studies and strategic plans for MTDs and mountain resorts the most. The main causes of the earlier, mainly negative trends in the development of tourism and the protection of mountain regions in Serbia lay less in the sphere of planning and much more in the unstable political and socio-economic conditions for development, as well as in the non-harmonized system of laws, competences, etc. The MTD development achieved is not the result of the strategic planning implementation, and neither can it be a significant model for the future development of other mountain areas in Serbia.

Over the past few decades, significant results have been achieved in the sustainable development of mountain regions and mountain tourism in Europe, while in Serbia the unsolved economic and social relationships, and unregulated market mechanisms, along with social and political contradictions, have slowed the development processes in MTDs and intensified the conflicts between tourism and the protection of natural heritage and natural resources and the quality of life of local communities. In this context, the main task is to identify the current mistakes, review the approaches to the development of tourism and complementary activities in MTDs in Serbia, and adjust and implement the European and other foreign experiences in a way that is tailored to our specific requirements (Maksin and Milijić, 2013).

Following on from previous research, conducted mainly at the Institute of Architecture and Urban & Spatial Planning of Serbia, this paper provides a comparative overview of the previous, current and expected trends in the development

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of MTDs in European countries and their achieved and potential influence on the development of MTDs in Serbia. This analysis represents a starting point for identifying key problems and exploring possibilities for improving the role of strategic planning in the future planning guidance and management of the sustainable spatial development of MTDs in Serbia.

## RETROSPECTIVE ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING OF TOURISM IN SERBIAN MOUNTAIN REGIONS RELATIVE TO EUROPEAN TRENDS

### Retrospective on tourism development in the mountain regions of Serbia relative to European trends

The first types of organized tourism (urban and spa tourism) emerged in Serbia at the end of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century under the direct influence of the overall development as well as that of tourism in Europe, while the organized development of mountain winter tourism began in the 1970s. Tourism development in the mountain regions of Serbia has undergone five phases so far (Mitrović, 1983; Dabić, 1996; Milijić, 2005; Maksin *et al.*, 2011; Maksin and Milijić, 2013; Milijić, 2015):

- Initial phase – from 1901 until the Second World War.
- Preparatory phase – from the end of the Second World War until 1968.
- Development phase – from 1968 until 1990.
- Phase of crisis – from 1990 until 2007.
- Gradual recovery phase – from 2007 onwards.

A brief comparative overview of the characteristics of and relationship between these phases and the processes and trends in tourism in the mountain regions of European countries, primarily those of the Alpine countries, is given in Table 1.

The common characteristic of all generations of MTDs in Alpine countries is that they are located in the mountain snow zones or in their immediate vicinity, with ski slopes on which the snow cover remains throughout the winter. This condition was determinant for planning and developing the resorts in the higher, most valuable and most attractive zones of the mountains, on the boundaries between forests and pasture areas. At the beginning of their development, the mountain resorts earned most of their income from tourism in the winter season. With the development of the tourism industry, the offer also included tourism programs outside the winter season. Today, the traditional mountain resorts are earning most of their income from tourism during the summer season, thus they have become all-year-round destinations. Tourism has been the main regional development potential in most parts of the Alps, but it is believed that tourism cannot be the only bearer of development, due to which special attention is paid to a balanced development and relativization of the conflicts between tourism, agriculture and tourism, and the protection of nature and the environment. In this process, preserving the natural environment of mountain regions and enabling a better quality of life for the local residents are striven for. The key role in the development of mountain resorts, starting from the second generation of mountain resorts, is the state's role in the planning guidance and management of MTDs and their tourism offer, whereby

Table 1: Comparative, chronological overview of tourism development in the mountain regions of Serbia and Alpine countries

Serbia			Alpine countries		
Phase of the MTD development	Characteristics: 1. Altitude criterion for MTDs 2. The dominating offer - W, S, AYR 3. Characteristics of the MTD development - SD, P, R, UD	Period	Phase – Generation of MTDs	Characteristics: 1. Altitude criterion for MTDs 2. The dominating offer - W, S, AYR 3. Characteristics of the MTD development -SD, P, R	Period
Initial phase	1. Beginning of mountain recreation and tourism 2. S 3. SD	1901-1940	1 <sup>st</sup> generation of MTDs	1. Lower and middle altitudes 2. S 3. SD-P	Late 19 <sup>th</sup> century - early 20 <sup>th</sup> century
Preparatory phase	1. Lower and middle altitudes 2. S, initiated W 3. SD	1945-1968	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation of MTDs	1. 1200-1500m 2. W 3. P	1945-1970
Development phase	1. New MTDs> 1500 m 2. W 3. P	1968-1990	3 <sup>rd</sup> generation of integrated MTDs	1. 1500 - (>)2000m 2. W 3. P	1970-1980
Phase of Crisis	1. - 2. W in higher, S in other mountains 3. UD	1990-2007	4 <sup>th</sup> generation of Polyvalent MTDs	1. 2000-1000 m 2. W→AYR 3. P	1980-2005
Gradual recovery phase	1. - 2. AYR in higher, S in other mountains 3. R, with occurrence of UD	2007 -	5 <sup>th</sup> generation of MTDs	1. above 1600 m 2. AYR 3. P, R	2005 -

List of abbreviations: MTD–mountain tourism destination, W–winter tourism, S–summer tourism, AYR–all year round tourism, SD – spontaneous development, P–planned development, R – re-planning, UD – uncontrolled development

the state develops partnerships with the private sector and includes all relevant actors and local communities in the decision making process (Richins *et al.*, 2016), which recently evolved into a collaborative planning process (Richins, 2016).

The state had a determinant role in the planning guidance for MTD development and in its management in Serbia in the preparatory and development phases. The phase of crisis in the development of mountain regions began in 1990 when the system of planning guidance for developing MTDs was abandoned and their development was left to the influences and interests of spontaneous and uncontrolled market operations, when stagnation and unbalanced and uncontrolled MTD development took place. The sustainability of MTDs is being challenged, since the economic interests of the tourism industry for intensive construction of tourism facilities and their spatial concentration prevail. Proposed developments may cause negative impacts on the environment, as well as on the social and economic development of local communities (Maksin and Milijić, 2013). The gradual recovery phase that tentatively began in 2007 is characterized by the intensification of the state's investments in the formation of public ski resorts, the development of capital infrastructure, etc., but still without sufficient alignment of the spatial development of tourism destinations with the protection of mountain regions (Dabić *et al.*, 2009).

The problem of managing MTD development has manifested itself in all phases, but it culminated in 1990 when any form of management was lost. In addition, selecting and using appropriate management models has been constantly postponed, as indicated by the recently adopted Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia 2016-2020 (2016).

### **Critical view of the role of strategic planning in tourism development in the mountain regions of Serbia**

In certain phases of MTD development, the sectoral planning basis for developing tourism in Serbia has included different development program modalities –within the plans for socioeconomic development in the preparatory phase of development and master plans for tourism development in the period 2007-2012 (Dabić *et al.*, 2009).

The planning basis for the protection and spatial development of mountain tourism in Serbia was formed after 1968 and improved in the next phases of MTD development. The first planning basis included urban plans for tourism localities in the lower mountain regions suitable for summer tourism. For this reason, the consideration of the overall potential and resources for tourism development in MTDs failed to take place, and neither was there any consideration of the possibilities for integrating the tourism offer with the surroundings or the identification of problems of environmental protection and the protection of natural and cultural heritage. The theoretical and methodological knowledge in the field of overall spatial planning and spatial planning for mountain regions in Serbia was first used when drawing up the Regional Spatial Plan for the area of 10 municipalities in the Kopaonik massif 1968-1971, then in the regional program for tourism development in the

western parts of the Sar-planina and Prokletije mountains (1972), while the spatial plans for the special purpose areas for MTDs have increasingly gained importance over time (Dabić and Milijić, 1998).

The elements of the contemporary holistic and problem approaches to MTD planning have been introduced under the influence of the European experiences, particularly the experiences of the Alpine countries (Milijić, 2005; Maksin *et al.*, 2011; Dabić *et al.*, 2009; Milijić, 2016). The Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia (1996) was the first strategic document to establish sustainable territorial development and to introduce the concept of the sustainable spatial development of tourism in the entire territory of Serbia. The tourism regions/destinations identified in the national spatial plan (1996, 2010) are predominantly situated in the mountain regions of Serbia south of the river Danube. Starting from the end of the third phase of MTD development, spatial plans for special purpose areas (SPSPA) have been continuously adopted for all MTDs, which are mostly protected areas as well. The special purposes for which SPSPAs are developed are dominant and can be a source of significant environmental impacts and impacts on the quality of life of local residents, but also a cause of conflict between tourism and the protection of natural heritage and natural resources, as well as between tourism and the development of local communities. For this reason, the existing and potential tourism related conflicts have been identified and minimized in the process of drawing up the SPSPAs for MTDs and carrying out a strategic assessment of their impacts relative to other purposes and activities, thus enabling the selection of the planning solutions that contribute to the sustainable territorial development of MTDs and protected areas.

The problem of coordinating spatial and environmental factors with the sector planning framework is most pronounced in the tourism sector in current Serbian planning practice, namely in the fifth phase of MTD development. While the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (2006) was, to some extent, linked to spatial planning - the Spatial Plan of the Republic of Serbia (1996), this cannot be said for the new Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2016-2020. Although the new strategy indicates the problem of the lack of a standardized integrated system of planning, management and coordination of the development of tourism regions, the determinants of this sectoral strategic framework do not provide even the basic preconditions for overcoming the problems in coordinating the sectoral planning and the spatial and environmental planning and problems in forming an integrated system of strategic and operational planning for these regions. Both strategies envisage that the determinants should be elaborated through the strategic master plans and tourism development programs, and they also establish an obligation according to which a strategic master plan should be a starting basis for drawing up the spatial, urban and other plans for tourism destinations. The implementation of this obligation since 2007 has contributed to the intensification of conflicts between tourism and other purposes, as well as to disabling the sustainable development of MTDs. Due to the market-

driven approach and partial overview of developing tourism destinations used, substantial negative effects of tourism on natural heritage, resources and the environment, as well as on local community development and the quality of life of local residents can manifest themselves in the implementation of the master plans for the MTDs in Stara Planina, Golija and Kopaonik. After adopting the tourism development master plans for these MTDs, a significant problem occurred in developing the SPSPAs for these areas. Without prior verification and without achieving spatial, environmental, social and economic sustainability, concepts and solutions based exclusively on the sector (economic) approach in tourism development master plans jeopardize the planning concepts and solutions based on the holistic approach in SPSPAs (Dabić *et al.*, 2009; Maksin *et al.*, 2011). Although SEA is not being applied to master plans in the tourism sector for the time being, its application in SPSPA has contributed to achieving a certain balance between the sectoral and holistic approaches to development and protection, with a view to achieving the sustainable territorial development of MTDs (Nenković-Riznić *et al.*, 2016).

Since 1990, the lack of coordination between sectoral planning in tourism and spatial and environmental planning, the lack of support for the implementation of planning documents, and the domination of political and covert influences in decision making have contributed to the prevailing uncontrolled development of MTDs, the marginalization of the role of strategic planning and the limited implementation of spatial planning in their development.

## PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING OF TOURISM IN THE MOUNTAIN REGIONS OF SERBIA RELATED TO THE EUROPEAN TRENDS

### Prospects for tourism development in the mountain regions of Serbia relative to European trends

The integrated development of mountain destinations in European countries will continue to be based on the achievement of three goals: economic and social cohesion; sustainable development; and balancing the competences in management. In the future, tourism will also be a basis for the sustainable development of mountain regions in European countries. The long-term commitment of the Alpine MTDs lies in the intensification of their all-year-round tourism offer in which winter tourism will continue to play a significant role (Macchiavelli, 2009; Milijić, 2015).

The interest in high mountain resorts (above 1500m) declined in the Alpine countries over a relatively short period, from 2000 until 2005, due to the high costs of construction and use, so that the trend was mostly redirected towards more rational, traditional and new mountain resorts and settlements at lower altitudes. However, the coming period will be marked by new approaches conditioned by economic recession, changes in interests and the scope of demand, as well as by climate change and investment policies related to climate change which, as a rule, grant loans for mountain ski resorts at an elevation above 1600m. The present trends are towards an innovative winter and summer mountain

tourism offer, rather than the growth of existing towns and resorts, as well as the balanced and modest development of new tourist resorts (Schmidt *et al.*, 2016).

The management of sustainable MTD development is a process that includes the securing of different supports in carrying out the priorities and phases of development, as well as the control and monitoring of implementing the planning decisions. The experiences of Alpine countries in terms of the state's role in managing sustainable MTD development (Macchiavelli, 2009; Richins, 2016; Schmidt *et al.*, 2016), adapted to the local conditions, should be used in Serbia, including:

- Strict control of the protection of natural heritage, natural resources and the environment, and control of the use and development of the area.
- Integration and unified policies implemented by the majority of stakeholders in MTDs.
- Organizational and strategic innovations to provide the flexibility to face the challenges imposed by the market.
- Cooperation and collaboration in developing the planning basis (for the spatial, urban and sectoral plans, policies and programs) and defining the priorities of development.
- The establishment of an optimum model for managing the protection and development of MTDs (e.g. a "corporate model" in which tourist property ownership and services are managed by a single company), along with different modalities of the participation of private and non-government sectors and local communities.
- Specialization of the sectoral and multisectoral state and para-state organizations in the management of sustainable development of regions and sustainable tourism.
- The provision of incentive measures (financial, fiscal, etc.) for initiating and carrying out efficient, profitable and attractive tourism and recreational activities, or the provision of correctional and restrictive measures when tourism development causes a certain degradation of natural resources (but has significant socio-economic benefits), or when, in spite of the availability of resources, the tourism development is not successful (alternative directions of development).
- The introduction of development certificates (licenses) as a form of controlling MTD development, i.e. operation of the tourism and other facilities aimed at protecting the quality of services and the environment.

On the basis of the Alpine countries' and Serbian experiences in developing MTDs, the main measures for achieving the sustainable development of MTDs in Serbia would be the following (Milijić and Dabić, 2004):

- In the initial stages of the MTD activation, the state should play a priority role in the plan-based development and management of the transport and utility infrastructure and certain non-commercial contents of the public standard, in the tourism infrastructure and equipment, and in the land acquisition and land development.

- In the next stages of the MTD development, it is necessary to control the preparation and implementation of the development projects based on their proven ecological suitability, economic viability and social acceptability for the local residents.
- In all stages of development, it is necessary to encourage the use of the model for sparsely distributed localities which have smaller parts in the altitude zones of mountains and greater parts in the sub-mountain settlements, as the most acceptable model for developing MTDs.
- In all stages of development, it is necessary to direct and support the development of all-year-round tourism with competitive tourism products and a presentation of all the advantages of the region.

It can be expected that in Serbia climate change will contribute to the balancing of the summer tourism offer and demand with the winter tourism offer and demand, as well as to a more intensive activation of the priority high-mountain regions, but also the activation of lower- and middle-altitude mountain regions and other tourism resources in their regional surroundings.

The role of the state as an initiator of and partner in the planning guidance and management of MTD development will be decisive in achieving the sustainable territorial development of MTDs in European countries and in Serbia. The national level of management in Serbia should play a more active role in integrating the strategic planning and management of sustainable development, particularly the sustainable development of high-mountain MTDs, given that the regional level of management has not been established, while the experiences of MTD development since 2007 have shown that the prevailing interest of local-level management is to intensify real estate development for the purpose of collecting revenue on this basis.

The management models should be differentiated according to the level of development of MTDs – from the MTDs in an advanced stage of development, such as Kopaonik and Zlatibor, to the MTDs in the initial stage of development, such as Mt Stara planina and Golija. In this context, the dynamics of establishing appropriate management models should be speeded up and differentiated relative to the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2016-2020.

### **The expected role of strategic planning in developing tourism in the mountain regions of Serbia relative to European trends**

The approach to defining the starting bases in the strategic planning of tourism development in mountain regions of Serbia should be based on the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, the Strategy for Sustainable Tourism in Europe's Nature and National Parks, Guidelines of the European Commission on Mountain Areas and European Integration, and other international documents (Milijić, 2015).

The strategic planning of sustainable tourism in the mountain regions of Serbia should be based on the use

of the most successful examples of European practice adapted to the local conditions. The trends in managing development in European countries show the integration of spatial and environmental planning within the institutional and organizational models that have a coordinating role in planning and directing territorial development.

The coordinating and integrating role of spatial planning in strategic planning, and in managing and achieving sustainable territorial development should be supported, particularly in the sensitive and protected mountain areas. It is necessary to align different sectoral plans and programs in the spatial planning process and to achieve multisectoral coordination among all competent entities of development in the public sector, as well as participation in the planning process, the establishment of partnerships between all key participants/actors in decision making and the implementation of planning decisions to enable the coordination and integration of strategic planning within the decision making in managing MTD development. For making and implementing planning decisions, it is also necessary to provide a monitoring system for the natural heritage and the environment, construction, land development and development of the tourism offer, as well as to establish an integrated management system for MTDs (tourism development, the protection of nature and the environment, etc.).

In the case of MTDs, spatial planning should achieve a coordinating role primarily in relation to the sectoral planning basis for the protection of nature (protected area management plans) and development of tourism (strategic master plans and tourism development programs).

The basic principles for the relativization of conflicting interests related to the protection of natural heritage and natural resources and tourism development include: the participation of tourism in the protection and improvement of nature; responsibility for damages and compensation; and the inclusion of local residents in the protection, promotion and use of nature and local products. The achievement of these principles in the strategic planning process requires a series of actions, from the determination of the capacity of the area, through the presentation of the natural and cultural heritage of the area, to the organization of the all-year-round tourism offer in the area and activation of the potentials of local residents. It is necessary to re-examine the concept of resort development and the capacity of stationary users in the altitude zones of MTDs in accordance with the new approaches and decisions from international financial institutions on investments in mountain areas, and where they are built. It is necessary to, in a strategic sense, "rehabilitate" them by developing the infrastructure, landscape, etc. The strategic concept should be to direct the focus of future tourism development towards so-called secondary resorts and tourism settlements in the lower altitude zones of mountains that will be well connected by vertical transport systems to the altitude zones. It is also necessary to establish and implement the priorities in and stages of development of infrastructure systems and mountain resorts (Milijić, 2015).

In Serbia, the attitudes towards MTD development have generally always been linked to experiences in the development of the Kopaonik region. The norms and standards used in developing the Kopaonik MTD have relied on the norms and experiences of France and Switzerland. The Suvo Rudište mountain resort in Kopaonik represents a good example of the realization of MTD development in the period before 1990 (Milijić and Dabić, 2004). However, since then it has been an example of the escalation of all of the problems and conflicts in MTD development – uncontrolled construction and the non-observance of the SPSPA rules due to pressure from investors and the local level of management to develop accommodation capacities which threaten the most valuable protection zones, as well as ski infrastructure development. There is also a lack of any form of management of tourism and MTD development, etc. Relative to other MTDs, this region has the longest tradition and continuity in developing SPSPAs – the first one was in 1989, and the last one in 2016.

The new methodological approach used in developing the SPSPA for Kopaonik from 2016 can be a directive approach for realizing the coordinating role of spatial planning in MTD strategic planning. The new methodological approach is based on the combined use of the integrated and participative approaches in the decision-making process on the protection and sustainable development of MTDs. Through the process of developing the SPSPA, the key conflicts in the protection and sustainable spatial development of MTDs were identified – between tourism and the protection of natural heritage and biodiversity, between the local residents and the protection of natural heritage and natural resources, and between the local residents and tourism. In the next methodological step, the strategic commitment for the relativization of the identified conflicts served for checking the sustainability, the coordination and relativization of conflicting sectoral decisions on the protected areas (from the Law on National Parks and Decree on Protection Regimes) and decisions on the protection of cultural heritage, as well as the development of tourism (from the Master Plan for Tourism Destination Kopaonik and urban plans for tourism sub-resorts in the National Park) and development of infrastructure systems, and the development decisions of the local-level management. Based on these checks, and starting from good European practice in managing protected areas and MTD development, several scenarios for the coordination and relativization of the conflicting sectoral and development decisions were prepared – scenarios for the differentiation of the protection zones with the most suitable ski slopes and localities for the development of mountain resorts. The compromise solution for aligning the zones for tourism and recreational infrastructures with stricter natural heritage protection regimes was selected. It was necessary to use the participative approach for achieving the coordination and relativization of conflicts in a way in which, besides the protected area managers, the key actors at national and local levels of management in the protection of natural resources and the environment, tourism, ski resorts and spatial planning were also included in the process of considering the scenarios offered and making decisions on the selection of the most suitable one.

## CONCLUSIONS

The development of tourism in the mountain regions of Serbia will take place following European trends. Alpine countries' experiences in sustainable MTD development will be selectively implemented and adapted to the local socioeconomic conditions, characteristics of mountain regions and effects on the local and regional territorial development.

The intensification of the all-year-round tourism offer for MTDs in which winter tourism will continue to dominate is a precondition for activating the available potential and for more intensive tourism development. It can be expected that climate change will contribute to balancing the summer tourism offer and demand for it with the winter tourism offer and related demand, as well as to a more intensive activation of high-mountain MTDs, but also the activation of the lower- and middle-altitude mountain areas and other tourism resources in their regional surroundings.

The role of the state as an initiator and partner will be decisive in the planning guidance and management of the sustainable territorial development of MTDs and their regional surroundings. The national level of management in Serbia should achieve a significant role in integrating the strategic planning and management of sustainable development, particularly in the high mountain MTDs.

For integrating strategic planning into the decision making process for managing the development of MTDs, it is necessary to align different sectoral plans and programs through the spatial planning process, primarily in the nature protection and tourism development sectors, and to achieve a multisectoral coordination among all competent entities of development in the public sector and realize the participation in the planning process, as well as to establish partnerships and collaboration between all key participants/actors in decision making on and implementation of planning decisions. The necessity for and possibility of achieving the coordinating role of planning have been checked and confirmed in the process of spatial planning for the Kopaonik National Park, the key area in the Kopaonik MTD. Starting from the key problems and conflicts in the protection and sustainable spatial development of the Kopaonik National Park identified in the process of developing the SPSPA, it is recommended that the national level of management should achieve a more active role in the process of sustainable MTD development through the overall control of the processes of planning and developing MTDs. For this reason, the commitment that has prevailed is to carry out a detailed elaboration of urban planning for all the contents of the tourism offer in the protected areas exclusively within the SPSPA and to continue the previous practice in elaborating the SPSPA through corresponding urban plans outside the boundaries of the protected areas.

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